

Spotlight on the writer: Nathalie Buckland
(Poems and Fiction)

ABOVE THE WHIRLWIND

I fly above the whirlwind
skim across the quicksand
the earth beneath me is
a mouth opening, opening,
while buried bones
sing low harmonies
seductive sirens calling

air thick with flower scent
supports my wingless flight
twigs tangle my hair
the sun drizzles honey on paddocks
glazing the grass
deceiving the eye
hiding the underground darkness

I'll soar while I can
reach for the planets
sift mysteries through my fingers
sear my wings on the sun

for, ashes or bones,
I will return to subterranean realms
and lie insensate

a forgotten fragment
in that crowded substratum
as the turning earth
moves towards its fate

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EVIL ANGELS

And will we let them out
Pandora-like,
or keep them still contained
within the boxes of our minds?
They flex their moth-like wings
planning escape,
mischief their intent.

The lid opens a crack
from time to time...
released,
they touch our tongues with venom
to lash and wound.

Close, close the lid,
resist the urge to hurt,
incite, coerce, compel.
It is a lifetime's struggle
for compassion to prevail.

DEALER

He daily wanders up and down the street.
From bakery to garage is his beat.
His jeans are faded, tattered, worn and old,
topped by an ancient jacket when it's cold.
As tourists pass he whispers in their ear
the message many of them wish to hear;
“A smoke, good heads, or pills, just say the word...”
While some walk by as though they haven't heard
his customers are many down between
the shops, imagining they won't be seen.
When blue starched cops appear he can't be found –
it's easy for him to go underground,
for like a cockroach thriving on decay
he scuttles to the closest hideaway.
One day somebody else will take his place.
I'll never see again his drugged-out face.
He might have gone to jail, or could have fled,
but it is likely that he'll soon be dead.
He listens to the needle's siren song,
and those who deal in death do not live long.

**Chaucerian style, published in Yellow Moon Poetry Journal

FIRE

By Nathalie Buckland

I have had to come inside and close all the doors and windows. Even now the smell and the taste of smoke hover and cling to everything. I pick up small things and put them down again. I have packed the car as full as I can, and am now unable to make the decision to leave. I wish a large fire fighter would loom through the haze, comforting in his yellow jacket and helmet, and say;

‘Josie, you have to go now!’

Or perhaps

‘Josie, it’s OK, we have the fire under control.’

Sometimes it is so hard being an adult and having to make all the decisions for myself and for Sam.

At least I know that today I made the right decision for Sam, and he is at this moment happily playing with my mother, safe in the middle of the village, away from the bush which surrounds our home.

We woke early this morning. Sam crept into my bed as usual when it was barely light. As soon as my eyes opened I became aware that there was something wrong with the sunlight. It had a peculiar rusty tinge to it where it caught the calico of the curtains. I got up and made a cup of tea for us both. Sam loves to sit beside me and drink his ‘tea’, milk with a teaspoonful from my cup added. He was full of chat, still excited about Christmas, and the presents he had just two days ago. I cannot afford big presents, but he was thrilled with the new back pack and lunch box, the textas and books, and some small trucks.

‘Now I’m all ready for PreSchool Mummy’, he said proudly.

My mum bought him a paddling pool with a kind of gazebo over it to shade him from the sun. It did not take much water to fill. I only have tank water here, which is why I cannot hose everything down now to reduce the fire risk. Sam has been in his little pool almost continuously, and so have I, huddled in the shade, trying to cool down a bit, away from the relentless sun.

This morning we went out straight after breakfast and Sam splashed happily with his toys. I, however, walked up the hill a little way and looked towards the valley. I did not like what I saw. Smoke curled and gushed through the gum trees far below. It was a dirty grey colour, and here and there I thought I saw a tiny flicker of a flame. Anxiously I raced indoors and grabbed the radio, taking it outside close to Sam. As I turned it on I heard the tail end of a State Emergency Services' warning about a bushfire burning out of control. I hardly needed the information as all my senses absorbed the reality of the situation; the smell of fire, the heaviness of the air, the ominous quiet with no sound of birds or small creatures. But the fire was still a good distance away, surely the fire fighters would put it out, or the wind change direction.

One thing I had to do; ensure the safety of my most precious possession.

'Sam', I said, 'Let's get you dry. I think Grandma would like us to pack up your new backpack with all your new things. As soon as you're ready we'll drive down to see her'. Sam eagerly co-operated, keen to show off his gifts, even though Mum had seen most of them on Christmas day. I strapped him in his seat and drove the few kilometres to the village, all the time trying to see where the fire was, and in which direction it was travelling. It still seemed a long way away, both from the village and from my home high up on the bush-clad hill. There were roads and a river in between. Surely there was no danger.

Mum was pleased and relieved to see us. She too had been listening to fire reports.

"Stay here, Josie", she urged. 'I'm sure the fire will be controlled soon, and you can go home when we know it's safe'.

But I thought of all my belongings. They were not of any real value, but to me they were precious. Each piece of furniture tells a tale; some I found at the Salvation Army store, my comfortable chair I got at an auction, and all Sam's things I bought at garage sales or had given to me. I have sanded, painted, hammered and sewn to make our little rented cabin a home. And all Sam's baby photos were there too.

'I'll just go and pack the car with some of the more important things just in case, Mum,' I said. 'I won't be long. I'll be really careful, don't worry.'

I had to have something just in case.

I fought so hard to make us into a little family. When Sam's father did a flit as soon as he found out I was pregnant I made a resolution. I would have this baby. I would disprove all the

theories about teenage mothers. I would love him and raise him well and make a real home for us. And when he was old enough I would take the place at university that I had had to defer, and eventually have a career. I was already on track, surely a fire would not send me back to square one.

So here I am, car packed and ready to go. It is clear that the fire jumped the river, came fast up the hill, and must be quite close. I hear sirens but there is no sign of the fire fighters. The smoke is much thicker, and I see that the ash is now glowing and tiny fires are springing up close to the house. I have to leave now, at once.

Newspaper cutting excerpt

December 28th

'... and also a young woman, Josie King, aged 22. Ms King was found semiconscious in her car after she fled from her house shortly before it was consumed by fire yesterday afternoon. She is in hospital recovering from smoke inhalation.'

Bio:

Nathalie Buckland, a precocious early reader in a house full of books in Wales, UK, was unaware that grandparents on both sides of the family were playwrights and poets. One grandfather was a patron of WB Yeats. Inspiration for Nathalie's poems comes from her family, her diverse local community of Nimbin, Australia, and the natural beauty of the surrounding countryside. Her haiku has been widely published both in Australia and internationally, and a book of her poetry, 'Shards & Figments', was recently released.